

Где мое место?

내 자리는 어디입니까 ?

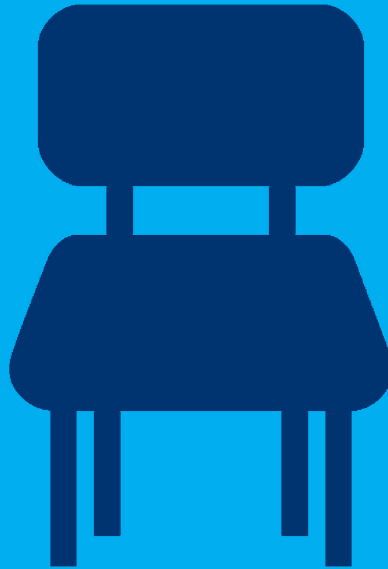
Ma dov'è il mio posto?

我的位子在哪里 ?

Mais où est ma place?

أين مقعدي ؟

¿Dónde está mi silla?



Where's My Seat?

How School Overcrowding Disproportionately
Impacts Immigrant Communities in New York City

A Report by Make the Road New York

November 2015



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1. Executive Summary

School overcrowding, which occurs when “the number of students enrolled in the school is larger than the number of students the school was designed to accommodate,” is rampant in New York City’s public school system. Across the city, students are forced to learn in crammed classrooms, ill-equipped trailers or temporary classroom units (TCUs), or other spaces not intended for instruction. New York City’s Department of Education (DOE) has acknowledged that more than 49,000 new seats need to be created to address the problem and committed to creating fewer than 33,000 new seats in coming years, and other more likely estimates put the number at more than 100,000.

As the City seeks to address the critical issue of overcrowding, it is important to ask: **is it a problem that the city’s diverse communities share equitably?** This report seeks to answer this question with regard to New York City’s (NYC) growing immigrant population. In particular, the analysis examines two questions:

- Do districts with higher proportions of immigrants have a greater overcrowding problem?
- Is the DOE school construction plan set to address the overcrowding needs of immigrant communities to the same extent as it does other communities across NYC?

To answer these questions, we compiled a data set that included the following variables for each school district in NYC: percentage of population that is foreign-born, median income, school seats needed according to the DOE Capital Plan, the number of seats the DOE is committing to create in the Capital Plan, and the percentage of needed seats identified by the DOE that it is committing to create in the Capital plan.

Using regression analysis, **we find that overcrowding is particularly pernicious in immigrant communities, and that the DOE Capital Plan shortchanges the immigrant communities where overcrowding tends to be worse.** When controlling for other variables, immigrant communities have larger overcrowding problems and greater unmet needs in the DOE’s current Capital Plan—meaning that their overcrowding problems will be more likely to persist into the future.

To address the overcrowding crisis, this report recommends:

- The DOE must revise its Capital Plan and commit to:
 - fully fund all of the more than 100,000 needed seats citywide;
 - ensure that the needs of immigrant communities are being met; and
 - remove all school trailers and place all students in real, permanent classrooms.
- As New York City proceeds with re-zonings to expand housing stock, it must give explicit priority for addressing the need for school construction.
- The New York City Council must create and coordinate a Task Force on Overcrowding to propose and advocate for solutions to this major problem.

NYC should be able to meet the needs of students across the five boroughs. If the DOE and the School Construction Authority (SCA) fail to act, they will continue to deprive the City’s children of the opportunity to learn and thrive that they need and deserve.

2. Introduction: New York City's Overcrowding Crisis and Immigrant Communities

Across New York City's (NYC) boisterous and contentious political landscape, there is widespread agreement on one thing: children deserve access to a high-quality education. At minimum, this requires that the Department of Education provide every student with a seat in a classroom where students can learn from their teachers without distraction and with the safe, healthy environment and the materials they need. Unfortunately, our school system is not currently meeting this basic standard of educational access. Myriad problems, including chronic under-funding and the siphoning off of public resources to support the charter system, exist, but this report focuses on one major structural obstacle to offering a quality public education to all New Yorkers: school overcrowding.

School overcrowding, which occurs when “the number of students enrolled in the school is larger than the number of students the school was designed to accommodate,”¹ is rampant in New York City's public school system. Across the city, students are forced to learn in crammed classrooms, ill-equipped trailers or temporary classroom units (TCUs), or other spaces not intended for instruction, which can also create health hazards. In some overcrowded schools, children are often forced to eat their lunch as early as 10am—meaning they have no food from the mid-morning to the end of the school day—because the cafeteria cannot accommodate all the students. In other cases, students are bused to schools far away from their homes because their local schools cannot accommodate them. And many schools do not offer students adequate physical education because they have no space for it.



“I’m worried about the TCUs because they can be a danger to our children, and I know that many others are suffering the problem that my granddaughter is facing.”

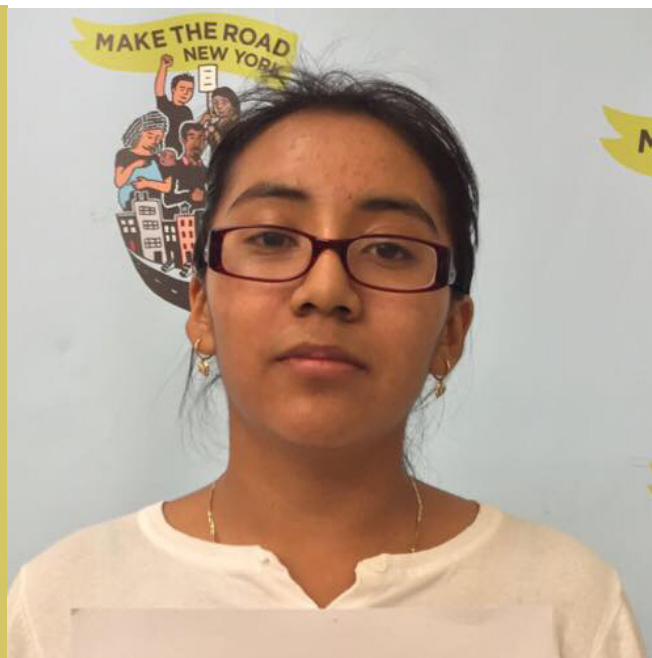
- Lilian Tercero,
Grandmother of First Grader at PS 143

Cases of over-crowding abound. In Corona, for instance, Make the Road New York (MRNY) member Lilian Tercero worries for her grandchildren. One of them started in First Grade last year at PS 143. When she began the last school year she was healthy, but she was assigned to a class in a TCU in disrepair. Since then, she has developed asthma, likely due to the conditions in the trailer. Lilian says, “I’m worried about the TCUs because they can be a danger to our children, and I know that many others are suffering the problem that my granddaughter is facing.” And she is right: poorly maintained trailers have been linked to asthma, due to mold and vermin, in various other parts of the city.²

Or take Diana Zarumeno, an MRNY member whose five year-old daughter is in kindergarten at PS81 in Ridgewood. Diana is concerned because her daughter has to study in an annex that is filled with students beyond its recommended capacity and has neither functional air conditioning nor a water fountain. She feels that her daughter is neither getting the attention she needs to learn nor the physical environment she needs to thrive. Diana also sees that older students in the school have to study in unsuitable TCUs, and she worries that she will have to try to find another school for her daughter to avoid this fate, as her cousins have already done.

“Our classes are so big, I don’t get the attention from my teachers that I need. Often, I have questions that my teachers don’t have time to answer in class, because there are so many of us. It leaves me feeling anxious, sad, confused, and angry.”

- Rosalba Grande
student at Forest Hills High School



Students feel the impact most of all. Rosalba Grande, an MRNY Youth Power Project member and student at NYC’s most overcrowded high school in Forest Hills, shares her experience and explains: “Every day I wonder why my school is so overcrowded. When we walk in the packed hallways, sometimes people exchange insults because there’s no room to walk and they bump into each other. And, because our classes are so big, I don’t get the attention from my teachers that I need. Often, I have questions that my teachers don’t have time to answer in class, because there are so many of us. It leaves me feeling anxious, sad, confused, and angry.”

Accounts like Lilian, Diana, and Rosalba’s are not just a few isolated incidents. According to a report by the New York City Comptroller, one in three primary schools is overcrowded.³ Nor is the problem new. School construction lagged behind during the twelve-year Bloomberg administration, and the New York City Department of Education (DOE) failed to track the full scale of the need across the public school system.⁴

The DOE itself currently estimates the current classroom seat deficit at 50,000, but the problem is likely greater. The “Enrollment, Capacity and Utilization Report” known as the “Blue Book,” using a different measure, found that close to 540,000 students study in overcrowded schools.⁵ And the advocacy organization Class Size Matters estimated the true need for new seats in 2014 to be at least 100,000, given the DOE’s Capital Plan’s insufficient attention to projected population growth.⁶

Given the scale of these estimates, it is clear that overcrowding is a citywide issue that cannot be eliminated overnight, or even in one mayoral term. But, as the City seeks to address this issue, it is important to ask: is it a problem that the city’s populations share equitably? Given the many accounts—like Lilian and Diana’s—that Make the Road New York has encountered of the overcrowding problems in immigrant communities,

this report seeks to answer this question with regard to the City’s growing immigrant population.

NYC’s current capital plan takes steps towards addressing overcrowding by committing to build nearly 33,000 seats. That plan, however, would still leave nearly 17,000 needed seats citywide unfunded, according to the DOE’s own estimates—and many more when one considers the higher estimates offered outside the DOE that better capture the projected population growth that the City is almost certain to experience. Persistent overcrowding will leave large swaths of NYC’s children receiving an uncomfortable and sub-standard education. And, as the City’s population swells to over 9 million people, according to the Department of City Planning, addressing overcrowding will also be critical for future generations.⁷



Diana Zarumeno is an MRNY member whose five year-old daughter is in kindergarten at PS81 in Ridgewood. Diana is concerned because her daughter has to study in an annex that is filled with students beyond its recommended capacity... She feels that her daughter is neither getting the attention she needs to learn nor the physical environment she needs to thrive.

Moreover, a failure to build all of the new needed seats will leave immigrant-heavy communities like Elmhurst and Corona, which have long been the site of some of the worst school overcrowding in NYC, with a shortfall of thousands of seats. (Table 1 below provides further data.)

Table 1: Data on School Overcrowding⁸

Needed new classroom seats identified by Department of Education (DOE)	49,257
Number of new classroom seats DOE is pledging to fund in 2015	32,629
Needed new classroom seats remaining unfunded, based on DOE analysis	16,628
Unfunded seats in District 24 and 30 in Queens, based on DOE analysis	5,366

This report focuses on the impact of overcrowding on immigrant communities across New York City (NYC). In particular, it examines two questions:

- Do districts with higher proportions of immigrants have a greater overcrowding problem?
- Is the DOE school construction plan set to address the overcrowding needs of immigrant communities to the same extent as it does other communities across New York City?

We present original quantitative research, based on data from the DOE Capital Plan and census data about school districts, to examine these questions.⁹ We find that the burden of overcrowding is not shared equally, nor are all communities getting the same commitment from DOE to address it. The data show that immigrant communities shoulder more of the burden of overcrowding than other New Yorkers, and that the overcrowding problems of immigrant communities are less likely to be addressed in the current DOE Capital Plan.

3. Data analysis

Given the scale of the overcrowding problem and the lived experience of immigrant community members, Make the Road New York conducted a quantitative analysis of the relationship between immigrant density in a district and 1) the scale of overcrowding and 2) the scale of the DOE's commitment to addressing it.

In particular, the analysis examines two questions:

- Do districts with higher proportions of immigrants have a greater overcrowding problem?
- Is the DOE school construction plan set to address the overcrowding needs of immigrant communities to the same extent as it does other communities across NYC?

To answer these questions, we compiled a data set that included the following variables for each school district in NYC: percentage of population that is foreign-born, median income, school seats needed according to the DOE's Capital Plan, the number of seats the DOE is committing to create, and the percentage of needed seats identified by the DOE that it is committing to create in the Capital plan.¹⁰

Using those variables, we then ran multivariate regressions to test the relationship between the variables. The first regression examined the number of seats as the dependent variable, while examining the foreign-born population percentage and the median income as the independent variables. The second regression analyzed the percentage of needed seats that the DOE was committing to fund as the dependent variable,¹¹ while examining the foreign-born population percentage, median income, and the number of seats needed (re-coded as a dummy variable that distinguished between districts needing fewer than 500 seats and those needing at least 500 seats) as the independent variables.

The results reveal a direct relationship between the immigrant density of school districts and the scale of the overcrowding problem. As the results in Table 2 demonstrate, when controlling for median income, there is a positive, statistically significant relationship between the immigrant density of school districts and the scale of the overcrowding problem. The magnitude of the effect is substantial: the result estimates that, **for every one percent increase in the immigrant population in a district, the overcrowding problem is 100 seats greater.**

Moreover, when controlling for other variables, Table 3 demonstrates that the DOE plan commits fewer new seats to immigrant-dense school districts. In other words, districts with more immigrants in them are more likely to be overcrowded and less likely to have a commitment from the DOE to create the new seats they need.

Districts with more immigrants in them are more likely to be overcrowded and less likely to have a commitment from the Department of Education to create the new seats they need.

In short, our analysis confirms that the overcrowding problem is particularly pernicious in immigrant communities and that the DOE Capital Plan shortchanges the immigrant communities where overcrowding tends to be worse. When controlling for other variables, immigrant communities in places like Corona, Elmhurst, Sunset Park, and Kingsbridge have larger overcrowding problems and greater unmet needs in the DOE's current Capital Plan—meaning that their overcrowding problems will be more likely to persist into the future.

Table 2: Relationship of Seats Needed to Immigrant Density

VARIABLES	Regression Coefficient for Seats Needed
% Foreign Born	9,976*
	(5,417)
Median Income	0.0554**
	(0.0219)
Constant	-5,918**
	(2,645)
Observations	32

Robust standard errors in parentheses

*** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1

Table 3: Relationship of Seats DOE Committed to Funding to Immigrant Density

VARIABLES	Regression Coefficient for % of Seats Funded
% Foreign Born	-7.883***
	(2.372)
Median Income	-1.30e-05
	(1.62e-05)
Needed 500+ seats	-17.41***
	(0.547)
Constant	22.76***
	(1.116)
Observations	32

Robust standard errors in parentheses

*** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1

4. Policy Recommendations

The conclusions from our data analysis are clear: school overcrowding is a major citywide problem that particularly affects immigrant communities, and these communities are getting short shrift in the current DOE Capital Plan.

To address the overcrowding crisis, this report recommends that:

- The DOE must revise its Capital Plan and commit to:
 - fully fund all of the more than 100,000 needed seats citywide
 - ensure that the needs of immigrant communities are being met; and
 - remove all school trailers and place all students in real, permanent classrooms.
- As New York City proceeds with re-zonings to expand housing stock, it must give explicit priority for addressing the need for school construction.
- The New York City Council must create and coordinate a Task Force on Overcrowding to propose and advocate for solutions to this major problem.

The overcrowding crisis is enormous in our City, but it can and must be addressed. With stronger action from the DOE and SCA, strong oversight and action from the City Council, and close collaboration with community organizations rooted in affected communities, NYC should be able to meet the needs of students across the five boroughs. If the DOE and SCA fail to act, they will be continuing to deprive the City's children of the opportunity to learn and thrive that they need and deserve.

5 KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Fully fund all of the more than 100,000 needed seats citywide
2. Ensure that the needs of immigrant communities are being met
3. Remove all school trailers and place all students in real, permanent classrooms
4. Prioritize school construction needs in re-zoning plans
5. Create and coordinate a Task Force on Overcrowding

Endnotes

- 1 “Condition of America’s Public School Facilities.” 1999. National Center for Education Statistics. Available here: <http://nces.ed.gov/surveys/frss/publications/2000032/index.asp?sectionid=8>.
- 2 “Moldy School Trailers Irk New York Parents.” April 8, 2014. The Epoch Times. <http://www.theepochtimes.com/n3/609678-moldy-school-trailers-irk-new-york-parents/>
- 3 “Financial Audit: Department of Education Efforts to Alleviate Overcrowding in School Buildings.” July 8, 2014. Office of the Comptroller of the City of New York. http://comptroller.nyc.gov/wp-content/uploads/documents/7E13_123A.pdf
- 4 *Ibid.*; “Space Crunch: Failures in Policy and Planning Leading to School Overcrowding.” Class Size Matters. June 2014. <http://www.classsizematters.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/06/SPACE-CRUNCH-Report-Final-OL.pdf>
- 5 “Enrollment, Capacity, and Utilization Report: 2014-2015.” New York City School Construction Authority. <http://www.nycsca.org/Community/CapitalPlanManagementReportsData/Pages/EnrollmentCapacityUtilization.aspx>. Cited also in “New Formula Increases Number of Overcrowded Schools in New York.” October 30, 2015. WNYC radio. <http://www.wnyc.org/story/more-half-city-elementary-and-middle-school-buildings-overcrowded/>
- 6 “Space Crunch: Failures in Policy and Planning Leading to School Overcrowding.” Class Size Matters. June 2014. <http://www.classsizematters.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/06/SPACE-CRUNCH-Report-Final-OL.pdf>;
- 7 “New York City Population Projections by Age/Sex & Borough: 2010-2040.” December 2013. New York City Department of City Planning. http://www.nyc.gov/html/dcp/pdf/census/projections_report_2010_2040.pdf
- 8 The data in this table are drawn from the DOE’s “FY 2015-2019 Proposed Five Year Capital Plan Amendment, available here (see page 20): http://www.nycsca.org/Community/CapitalPlanManagementReportsData/CapPlan/11052014_15_19_CapitalPlan.pdf
- 9 Make the Road New York would like to thank James Schlaffer of the University of Ohio for his support in completing the regressions and Sonya Reynolds of the New York Civic Engagement Table for her work to compile data. Thanks also to Megan Hester at the Annenberg Institute and Coalition for Educational Justice for reviewing this report and providing feedback and to the Scholars Strategy Network for its support in identifying sources of data support.
- 10 Note that this data set uses the data in the DOE Capital Plan. While we believe the actual total number of needed seats is significantly greater (see above), these data simply examine DOE’s assessment and plans for new seat construction to determine how immigrant communities fare relative to others in the DOE plans.
- 11 Statistical note: For this variable, districts identified by the DOE as needing zero seats were coded as having 100% of their needed seats funded. Strictly speaking, the value would have been indeterminate (it would have been zero divided by zero), but this recoding makes intuitive sense given that the DOE’s data suggest that the full needs of those districts are being accounted for and met through the Capital plan. Also note that the regression reported in Table 2 is a GLM regression and the regression reported in Table 3 is a Tobit regression.